The Honey-Cake Discourse

How a Single Encounter Reveals the Origin of Conflict and the Path to Clarity

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An Encounter in the Great Wood

The narrative begins with the Buddha meditating under a wood-apple tree in the Great Wood near Kapilavatthu. He is approached by Daṇḍapāṇi the Sakyan, who is described as “leaning on his staff.” This detail sets up a slightly confrontational mood.

> **"What is the ascetic’s doctrine? What does he assert?"**

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A Doctrine of Non-Contention

The Buddha gives his reply, which is the heart of the initial mystery.

> “Good sir, my doctrine is such that one does not argue with anyone in this world... And its is such that perceptions do not underlie the who lives detached from sensual pleasures, without indecision, stripped of worry, and rid of craving for rebirth in this or that state.”

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A Baffling Response

Daṇḍapāṇi does not understand or accept the teaching. His reaction is one of visible scorn and confusion.

> “...Daṇḍapāṇi shook his head, waggled his tongue, raised his eyebrows until his brow puckered in three furrows, and left leaning on his staff.”

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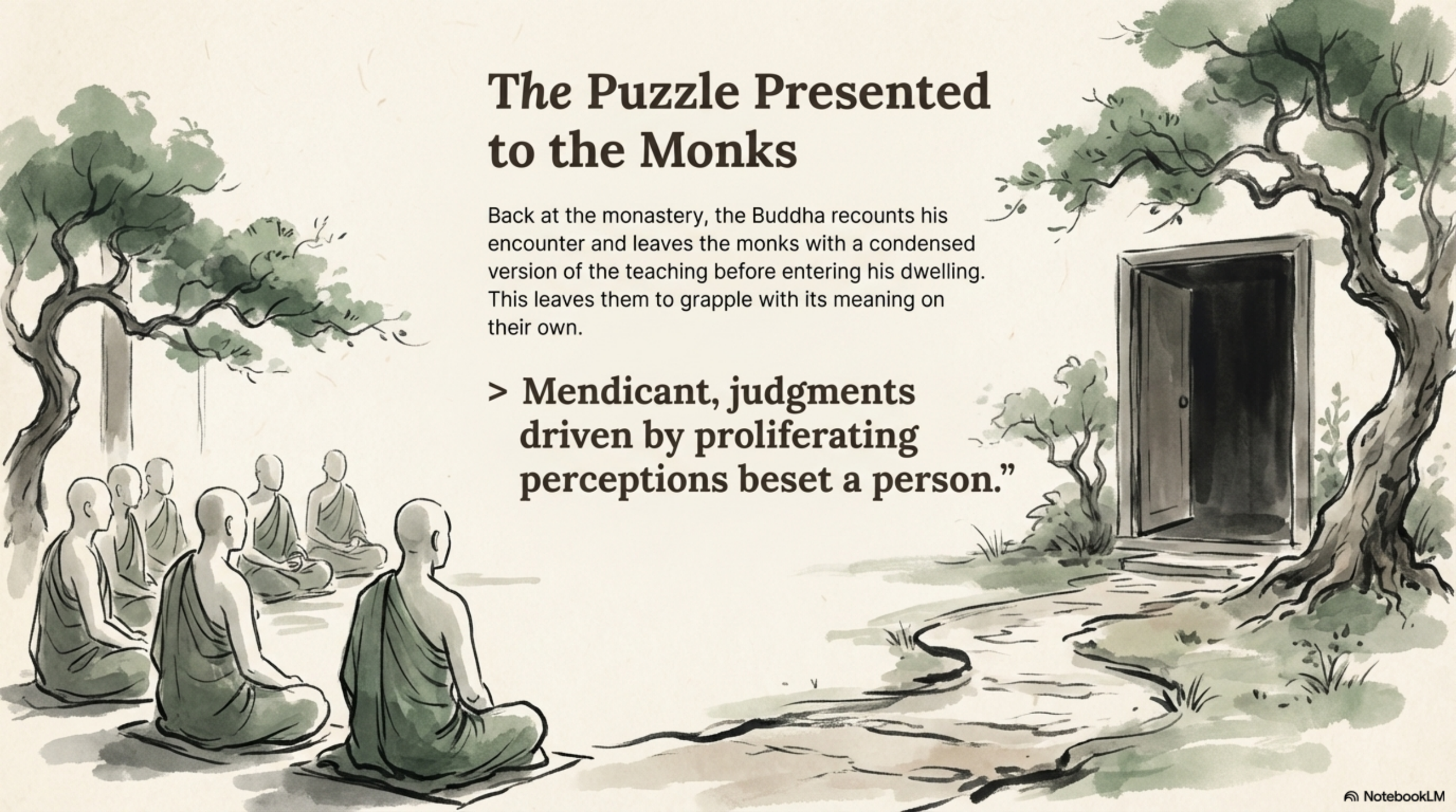
The Puzzle Presented to the Monks

Back at the monastery, the Buddha recounts his encounter and leaves the monks with a condensed version of the teaching before entering his dwelling. This leaves them to grapple with its meaning on their own.

> **Mendicant, judgments driven by proliferating perceptions beset a person."**



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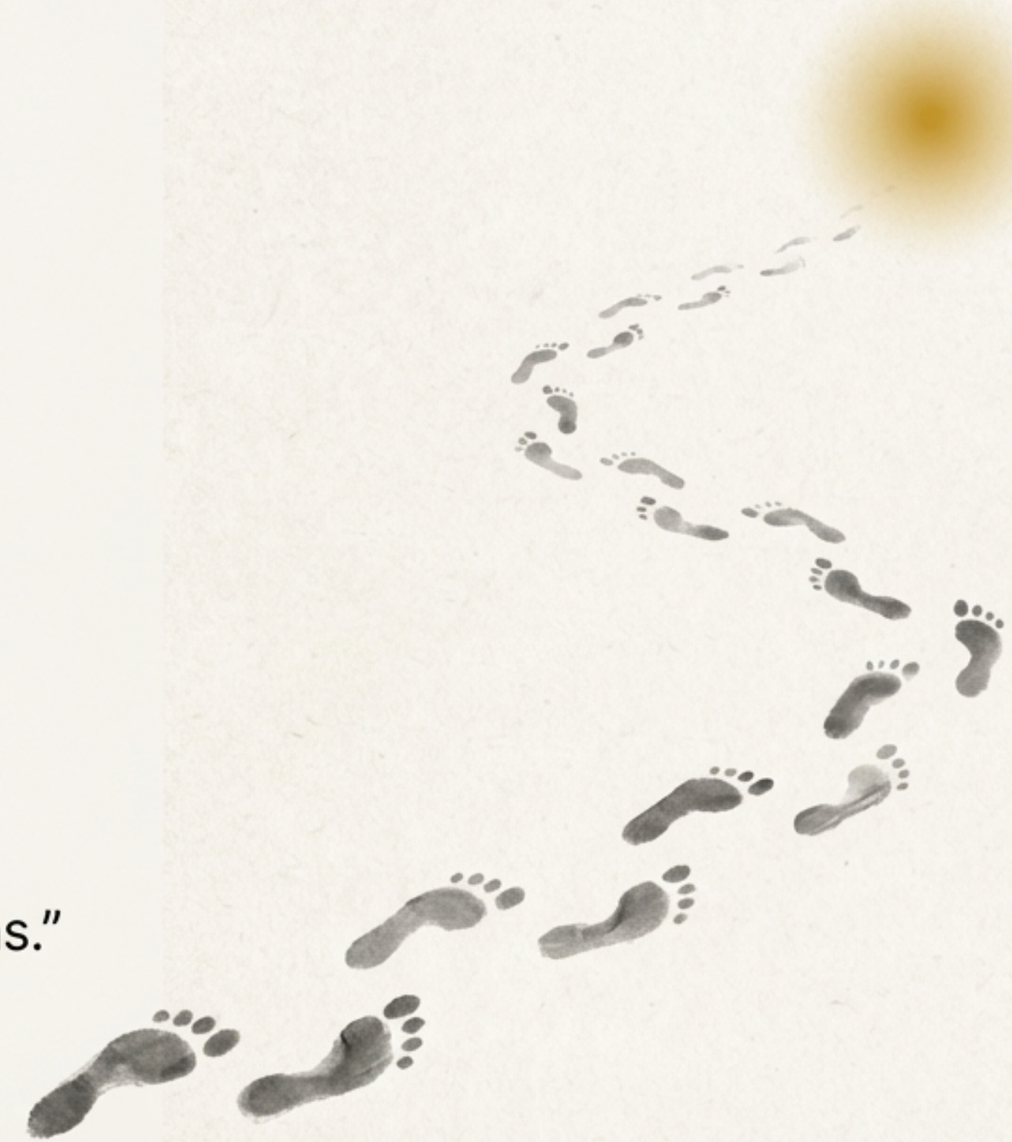
The Quest for an Interpreter

The monks feel the weight of the Buddha's brief statement. Recognizing they need help, they decide to approach Venerable Mahākaccāna.

- Their reasoning: "The Buddha gave this brief summary recital, then entered his dwelling without explaining the meaning in detail."
- Their choice: They identify Mahākaccāna as one who is "praised by the Buddha and esteemed by his sensible spiritual companions."



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A Lesson on Seeking the Heartwood

When the monks ask Mahākaccāna for an explanation, he first gently chastises them with an analogy, reminding them they were just with the Buddha—the true source of the teaching.

“Suppose there was a person in need of heartwood... And while wandering in search of heartwood he’d come across a large tree standing with heartwood. But he’d pass over the roots and trunk, imagining that the heartwood should be sought in the branches and leaves.”

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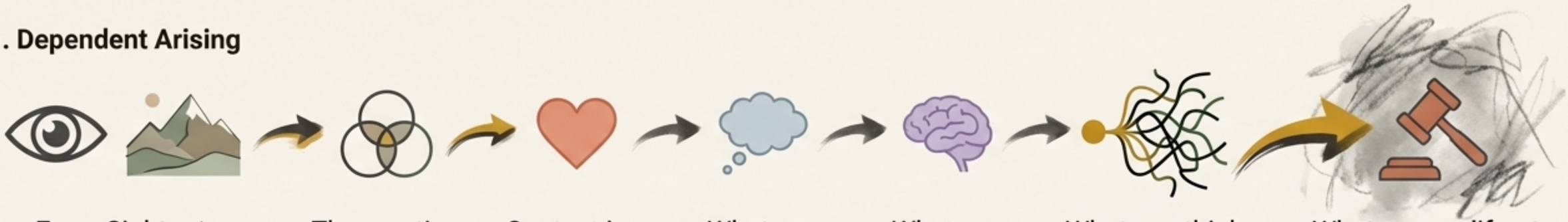
The Chain of Cognition: How Perceptions Proliferate

Mahākaccāna explains the sequence of events that begins with sensory input and ends in "judgments driven by proliferating perceptions."

1. Dependent Arising



Eye + Sights → Eye Consciousness

The meeting of the three is Contact.

Contact is a requirement for Feeling.

What you feel, you Perceive.

What you perceive, you Think About.

What you think about, you Proliferate.

What you proliferate is the source from which **Judgments** beset a person.

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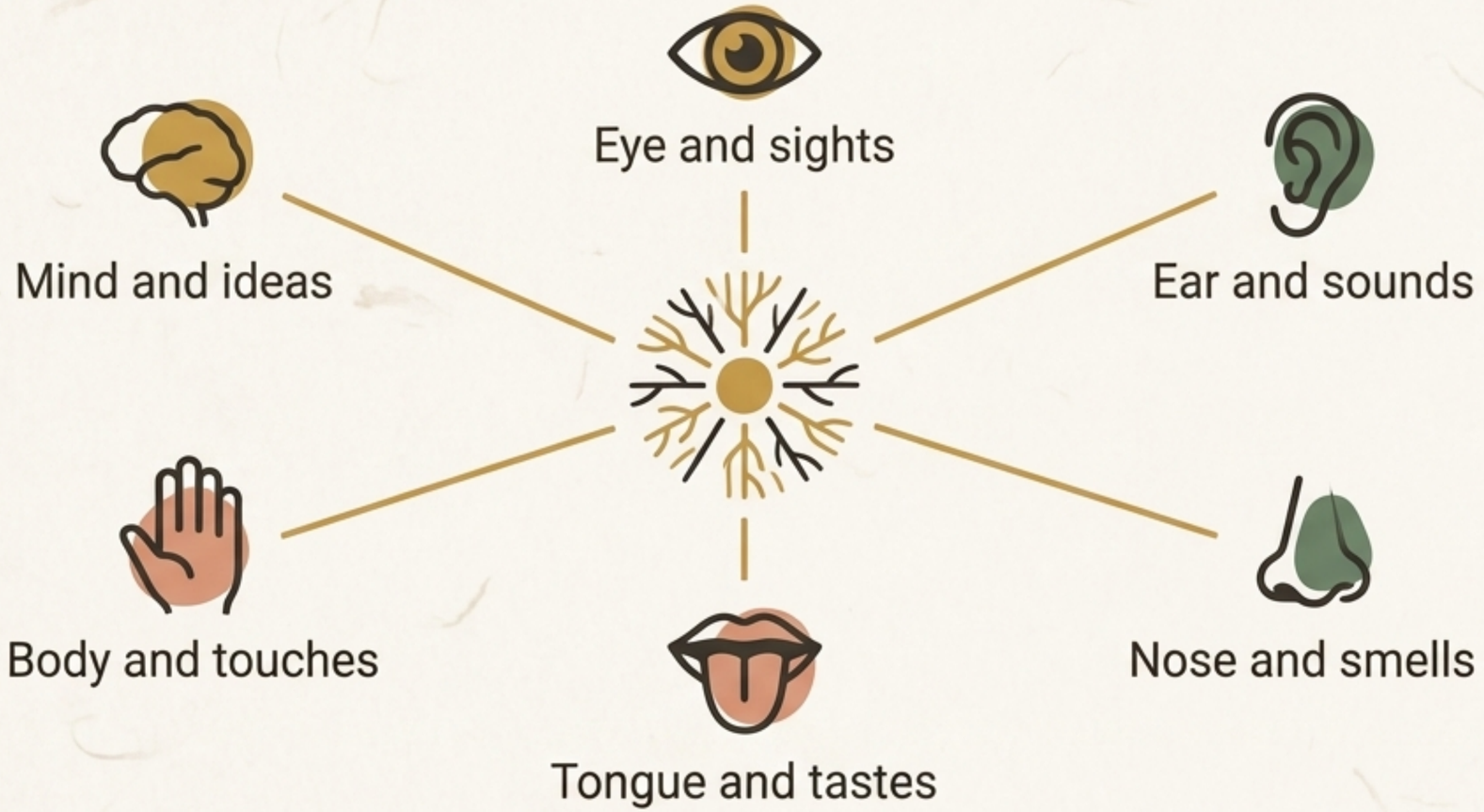
This Process Occurs Across All Six Senses

Mahākaccāna clarifies that the same chain of cognition applies to all sensory and mental inputs. This occurs with respect to objects known in the past, future, and present.



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The Path to Cessation

The explanation is completed by showing the inverse logic. If the initial conditions are not present, the entire chain leading to suffering cannot unfold.

> *"Where there is no eye, no sights, and no eye consciousness, it will not be possible to discover evidence of contact. Where there is no evidence of contact, it will not be possible to discover evidence of feeling..."*

> *"If they don't find anything worth approving, welcoming, or getting attached to in the source... just this is the end of the underlying tendencies..."*

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A Perfect Explanation

The monks go back to the Buddha and present Mahākaccāna's detailed analysis. The Buddha confirms that the explanation is flawless and exactly as he would have given it himself.

> **“Mahākaccāna is astute, mendicants, he has great wisdom. If you came to me and asked this question, I would answer it in exactly the same way as Mahākaccāna. That is what it means, and that’s how you should remember it.”**

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The Sweetness of Understanding

Venerable Ānanda, expressing his delight with the now-clarified teaching, offers a final, perfect metaphor.

- **“Sir, suppose a person who was weak with hunger was to obtain a honey-cake. Wherever they taste it, they would enjoy a sweet, delectable flavor. In the same way, wherever a sincere, capable mendicant might examine with wisdom the meaning of this exposition… they would only gain joy and clarity.”**

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A Name for the Teaching

Ānanda asks what this profound exposition should be called.
The Buddha gives it the name inspired by Ānanda's own analogy.

"Well then, Ānanda, you may remember this exposition of the teaching as

'The Honey-Cake Discourse'."

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